

KURDISTAN VOICE

KURMANJI GRAMMAR SERIES 03

Nouns in Kurmanji Kurdish

A Complete English-Language Grammar Guide & Practice Workbook

Gender • Number • Direct & Oblique Case • Ezafe • Indefiniteness • Possession • Exercises & Answers

A structured companion to the Kurdistan Voice Learn Kurdish series. Grammar explanations focus on Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji).

1. What is a noun?

A noun names a person, animal, place, object, material, event, or abstract concept. In Kurmanji, nouns participate in grammatical gender, number, case, definiteness, and Ezafe constructions. These properties interact: a form cannot always be understood in isolation.

This course teaches Northern Kurdish (Kurmanji), using the Latin Hawar alphabet. Regional usage varies. Examples are pedagogical, and some inflections differ across dialects and registers.

Kurmanji	English
mirov	person
jin	woman
zarok	child
kitêb	book
mal	house/home
av	water
azadî	freedom
bajar	city

2. Gender: masculine and feminine

Many Kurmanji nouns belong to a masculine or feminine grammatical class. Grammatical gender is not always biological sex. The gender of a noun is often most clearly seen in its singular oblique form and in Ezafe agreement.

For a common masculine noun, the singular oblique ending is often -î; for a common feminine noun, it is often -ê. The feminine and masculine Ezafe forms also differ in many standard descriptions. Learn gender together with a sample phrase rather than guessing from the noun's meaning.

A number of nouns have variable gender across dialects, and some borrowed words are treated differently by speakers. Treat the table as illustrative, not as a complete noun dictionary.

Noun	Meaning	Illustrative oblique	Illustrative Ezafe
mêr	man	mêrî (oblique)	mêrê baş (Ezafe phrase)
jin	woman	jinê (oblique)	jina baş (Ezafe phrase)
bav	father	bavî (oblique)	bavê min (my father)
dayik	mother	dayikê (oblique)	dayika min (my mother)

3. Singular and plural

A basic unmarked noun form can refer to a singular entity, and after numerals the noun is often left in its basic form: du kitêb (two books), sê zarok (three children). Do not automatically copy the English plural -s pattern.

Plural marking is especially visible in oblique case and Ezafe environments. A common plural oblique marker is -an, as in zarokan. The plural Ezafe linker is commonly -ên, as in kitêbên min (my books). The exact stem and ending depend on the construction and variety.

Do not assume every -an form is a free-standing English-style nominative plural. The distinction between direct, oblique, and Ezafe forms matters.

Kurmanji	English
yek kitêb	one book
du kitêb	two books
sê zarok	three children
kitêbên min	my books
ji zarokan	from the children / of the children (context-dependent)

4. Direct and oblique cases

Kurmanji traditionally distinguishes a direct case and an oblique case in many noun phrases. The direct case is commonly used for the subject of a present-tense intransitive or transitive clause, while the oblique case appears after many prepositions, for objects in present-tense transitive clauses, and in other grammatical environments.

The exact alignment of past-tense transitive clauses is more complex: Kurmanji shows split ergative patterns, where the agent may be oblique and the patient direct. We introduce that here but analyze it fully in the verbs and past-tense lessons.

Illustrative pattern: Ez kitêbê dixwînim. (I read the book.) Here ez is direct, and kitêbê is a feminine singular oblique form. Ji malê means 'from the house' in a variety where mal is feminine.

Direct	Oblique
Direct pronoun	Oblique pronoun
ez	min
tu	te
ew	wî / wê (depending on referent and context)
em	me
hûn	we
ew (plural)	wan

5. Ezafe: linking nouns to descriptions

Ezafe is a linking construction between a noun and a following modifier or possessor. It is central to Kurmanji noun grammar. A simple beginner pattern is NOUN + EZAFE + ADJECTIVE / POSSESSOR.

Common patterns in a widely taught standard are masculine singular -ê, feminine singular -a, and plural -ên, although their realization and usage vary. The noun may also show other case endings in more complex phrases.

Compare: bavê min (my father), dayika min (my mother), kitêbên min (my books). An adjective can also follow: mêrê baş (the good man), jina baş (the good woman).

Phrase	Meaning	Pattern
bavê min	my father	masculine singular
dayika min	my mother	feminine singular
kitêbên min	my books	plural
mêrê baş	the good man	masculine singular
jina baş	the good woman	feminine singular

6. Indefiniteness and specificity

Kurmanji does not use an English-style obligatory ‘a/an’ article before every noun. An indefinite suffix -ek is common: kitêbek (a book), zarokek (a child). This is not identical to the numeral yek (one), which can emphasize a count.

In a noun phrase with modifiers, indefinite morphology and Ezafe can interact. The precise distribution differs across varieties and deserves attention in advanced study. A beginner should first distinguish a bare noun, a noun with -ek, and a phrase beginning with yek.

Definiteness in Kurmanji is not expressed by a single article equivalent to English ‘the’ in every context. Demonstratives, discourse context, case, and the construction itself can all contribute.

Form	Interpretation
kitêb	book / the book (by context)
kitêbek	a book
yek kitêb	one book
ev kitêb	this book
ew kitêb	that book

7. Demonstratives and noun phrases

Demonstratives identify entities in relation to the speaker or discourse. Basic direct-case demonstratives include *ev* ('this') and *ew* ('that'). Their oblique forms vary with gender and number, and the whole noun phrase must be analyzed rather than memorizing only *ev* and *ew*.

In standard descriptions, proximal oblique forms include *vî* (masculine singular), *vê* (feminine singular), and *van* (plural); distal forms include *wî*, *wê*, and *wan*. These are also found in related pronominal constructions.

Examples: *ev zarok* (this child), *ew kitêb* (that book), *ji vê malê* (from this house), *ji van zarokan* (from these children).

Form	Function
<i>ev</i>	this (direct)
<i>ew</i>	that (direct)
<i>vî / vê / van</i>	this (oblique m./f./pl.)
<i>wî / wê / wan</i>	that (oblique m./f./pl.)

8. Possession and noun relationships

Possession frequently uses *Ezafe* with an oblique pronoun or possessor. Compare *bavê min* (my father), *dayika te* (your mother), and *kitêbên wan* (their books). These forms are not word-for-word equivalent to the English possessive apostrophe.

An oblique pronoun after *Ezafe* may express possession, association, or another relation depending on the noun and context. More complex nested phrases should be approached step by step: identify the head noun, its *Ezafe* linker, and the following possessor.

Kurmanji	English
<i>bavê min</i>	my father
<i>dayika te</i>	your mother
<i>kitêbên wan</i>	their books
<i>mala me</i>	our home (in varieties treating <i>mal</i> as feminine)

9. Countable, mass, and abstract nouns

Some nouns commonly denote countable objects, such as *kitêb* (book) or *zarok* (child); others often refer to substances, such as *av* (water). Abstract nouns, such as *azadî* (freedom), name qualities or ideas.

This semantic distinction affects how quantities are expressed. For materials, use a measure word: *du lître av* (two liters of water). For countable objects, use a numeral plus the noun: *du kitêb* (two books).

Not all English countability judgments transfer directly to Kurmanji; the intended meaning and dialect matter.

Kurmanji	English
du kitêb	two books
sê zarok	three children
du lître av	two liters of water
azadî	freedom

10. Nouns with prepositions

Prepositions such as ji (from), bi (with/by), li (at/in), and bo (for/to) often introduce noun phrases. In standard Kurmanji, their complements frequently appear in oblique forms. Some prepositions are part of circumpositional constructions with a second element after the noun phrase.

Example: ji malê (from the house), bi min re (with me), li bajêr (in the city). The form bajêr is a common oblique of bajar; local variation should be expected.

Learners should study each preposition together with its noun phrase pattern, rather than memorizing an isolated English translation.

Phrase	English
ji malê	from the house
bi min re	with me
li bajêr	in the city
ji wan	from them

11. Nominalization and word formation

Kurmanji can form nouns from adjectives, verbs, and other bases. A productive abstract-noun ending is -î in forms such as azadî ('freedom') from azad ('free'). Not every word ending in -î is formed in the same way, and lexicalized words may be irregular.

Compound nouns, borrowed vocabulary, and profession names expand the noun lexicon. Some forms involve suffixes such as -kar and -van, but their meaning and productivity depend on the root. Avoid inventing forms without checking a dictionary.

Proper nouns, place names, and personal names also participate in noun phrase grammar, though capitalization and inflection vary in real-world writing.

Illustrative relationship	English
azad → azadî	free → freedom

Illustrative relationship	English
kar → karker	work → worker (lexical derivation)
Kurd → Kurdistan	Kurd → Kurdistan (place name formation)

12. Noun phrases in real sentences

Kurmanji is often described as having basic SOV word order, though information structure can alter order. Noun phrases can function as subjects, objects, possessors, and complements.

Examples: Zarok diçe dibistanê. (The child goes to school.) Ez kitêbê dixwînim. (I read the book.) Bavê min mamoste ye. (My father is a teacher.) Min kitêb dît. (I saw a book / the book, depending on context.) The last example belongs to the past-tense transitive system and will be analyzed later.

Do not interpret direct/oblique case using only English ‘subject’ and ‘object’ labels: tense and transitivity are crucial.

Kurmanji	English
Zarok diçe dibistanê.	The child goes to school.
Ez kitêbê dixwînim.	I read the book.
Bavê min mamoste ye.	My father is a teacher.
Min kitêb dît.	I saw a/the book.

13. Common learner mistakes

Mistake 1: Treating all nouns as genderless because the dictionary form does not show gender. Mistake 2: Adding an English-like plural ending after every number. Mistake 3: Confusing -ek (indefinite) with yek (numeral). Mistake 4: Ignoring the Ezafe linker between a noun and its possessor.

Mistake 5: Assuming a direct form always marks the subject, even in past transitive clauses. Mistake 6: Treating every regional variation as an error. Mistake 7: Copying English adjective-noun order into Kurmanji noun phrases.

Self-check: whenever you read a noun phrase, ask (a) what is the head noun? (b) is it masculine, feminine, or plural? (c) which case applies? (d) is an Ezafe linker needed? (e) is the phrase indefinite, demonstrative, or possessed?

14. Guided dialogues

Dialogue A — In a bookshop: A: Ev çi ye? (What is this?) B: Ev kitêbek e. (This is a book.) A: Du kitêb dixwazim. (I want two books.) B: Baş e. (All right.)

Dialogue B — Family: A: Ev kê ye? (Who is this?) B: Ev bavê min e. (This is my father.) A: Ew kê ye? (Who is that?) B: Ew dayika min e. (That is my mother.)

Dialogue C — Place: A: Tu ji ku derê yî? (Where are you from?) B: Ez ji bajêr im. (I am from the city.)

15. Exercises — Part A: Identify and translate

1. Translate into English: kitêbek; yek kitêb; du kitêb; bavê min; dayika te; kitêbên wan; ji malê; ev zarok.
2. Translate into Kurmanji: a book; two books; my father; your mother; their books; from the house; this child; three children.
3. Explain in one sentence the difference between yek kitêb and kitêbek.
4. Identify the head noun and possessor in: bavê min; dayika te; kitêbên wan.

16. Exercises — Part B: Grammar reasoning

5. Which Ezafe pattern is illustrated by bavê min? Which by dayika min? Which by kitêbên min?
6. Why is it misleading to call -an an ordinary plural ending in all contexts?
7. Give two grammatical environments in which the oblique case is commonly used.
8. Explain why the case of a subject in Kurmanji cannot be predicted without considering tense and transitivity.
9. Complete: ___ kitêb (three books); ___ min (my father); dayika ___ (your mother); ji ___ (from the house).
10. Identify a likely dialect-sensitive point in this lesson and explain how a learner should verify it.

17. Answer key

1. a book; one book; two books; my father; your mother; their books; from the house; this child.
2. kitêbek; du kitêb; bavê min; dayika te; kitêbên wan; ji malê; ev zarok; sê zarok.
3. Yek emphasizes the numeral 'one'; -ek commonly marks indefiniteness.
4. Head nouns: bav, dayik, kitêb; possessors: min, te, wan.
5. Masculine singular -ê; feminine singular -a; plural -ên.
6. Because -an is particularly associated with oblique plural marking and interacts with case, not merely with English-style counting.
7. After many prepositions; for objects in many present-tense transitive clauses; also in past transitive agent patterns.
8. Kurmanji has split ergative patterns, so past transitive clauses differ from present-tense alignments.

9. sê; bavê; te; malê. 10. Examples: gender assignment, Ezafe, or a prepositional noun form; compare a trusted reference grammar and native-speaker usage.

18. Further reading and source notes

Geoffrey Haig and Ergin Öpengin (eds.), Introduction to Special Issue: Kurdish — a critical research overview; see linguistic studies of Kurmanji case, gender and Ezafe.

W. M. Thackston, Kurmanji Kurdish: A Reference Grammar (Harvard), a commonly consulted pedagogical grammar.

D. N. MacKenzie, Kurdish Origins and linguistic studies, for historical context; do not treat historical etymology as a substitute for contemporary grammar.

University of Manchester Kurdish Linguistics Project: <https://kurdish.humanities.manchester.ac.uk/>

Institut Kurde de Paris resources: <https://www.institutkurde.org/>

This workbook is an original instructional synthesis. Illustrative phrases use a widely taught standard Kurmanji; local and dialectal variation is explicitly acknowledged.